

## Guidelines for Assessing COVID-19's Impact on the Assessment of Academic Performance

This document has been created as a companion document to *the Report of the "Micro" Task Force to Address COVID-19's Impact on Assessments of Academic Performance*. Its two principal objectives are:

- a) to support the ability of academic staff to communicate effectively, in contexts where their academic performance will be assessed, how COVID-19 may have affected their work and productivity; and
- b) facilitate the equitable assessment of academic performance by those responsible for making determinations of merit, reappointment, tenure, and promotion of academic staff (e.g., the Provost, Deans, Chairs/Directors, reappointment/tenure/promotion committees).

### 1) Governing principles

- Multiple factors have come into play since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic that may have affected academic performance and productivity. In many cases, the impact of these factors will endure, potentially for several years, even after we are able to resume, to the fullest extent possible, pre-pandemic academic life.
- Academic staff seeking reappointment, tenure, and/or promotion will have an opportunity to explain the effects of COVID-19 on their files, documenting especially how pandemic conditions may have slowed down or disrupted their work plans or progress. Likewise, academic staff ought to be given a chance to explain any negative impact of COVID-19 on their work in the context of the annual merit exercise.
- Colleagues responsible for assessing academic performance for the purposes of merit, reappointment, tenure, and promotion must consider whether and to what extent the onset of COVID-19 conditions affected the staff member's academic performance. The pandemic's bearing on performance will differ from one colleague to the next. Hence, those charged with performance assessment must make a reasonable assessment of the materiality of the circumstances affecting academic performance noted in an annual activity report (merit) or dossier (reappointment/tenure/promotion) .

### 2) For academic staff: an opportunity to explain

In all situations where their academic performance is assessed, academic staff shall be given a meaningful opportunity to explain how COVID-19 affected their work – whether in nature, scope, or pace. This opportunity to explain the pandemic's impact on work responsibilities shall take the following form of a one-page submission where academic staff may explain how COVID-19 exerted an adverse impact on performance/productivity. Chairs and Directors (or Deans in the case of Faculties without Departments) will encourage academic staff members to avail themselves of this opportunity.

All colleagues will be permitted to include this one-page submission with:

- activity reports for the purpose of **merit**, for all academic staff for the year ahead (2023); and

- dossiers submitted for the purposes of **reappointment, tenure, and promotion**, for any colleague who was appointed to a pre-tenure position before August 2022.

The following is a **non-exhaustive list** of factors engendered by COVID-19 that might have adversely affected a colleague's work, which may be cited in these one-page submissions. The submission should refer to the individual situation of the staff member:

- increased family care responsibilities
- restricted access to research facilities, sites, or other resources
- slowed infrastructure development necessary to conduct research (including building, installation, repairs, and commissioning of equipment)
- delayed procurement/acquisition of materials, equipment, specimens
- reduced ability to conduct collaborative work due to access restrictions to McGill facilities, partner facilities, field locations, etc.
- impact of travel restrictions on performance of duties
- departures, difficulty recruiting, and/or difficult relocation of graduate students
- delayed, deferred, narrowed, or canceled opportunities for research development, collaboration, and/or dissemination (e.g., conferences or research workshops; publications)
- impact of pivoting between remote and in-person teaching, and development of modalities to accommodate learner absences (e.g., lecture recording or online synchronous class participation)
- inability or curbed ability to carry out usual research, e.g., face-to-face work with human participants, engagement in public performances
- personal health conditions that might have required special precautions, reducing ability to carry out academic work
- personal health impacts – including mental health impacts
- expanded or new duties assigned or assumed on account of the pandemic that (e.g., new leadership roles, exceptional teaching duties, added graduate and undergraduate mentorship responsibilities, support to other colleagues, for instance, to assist with new and changing modes of teaching), which limited time for other academic work. Colleagues assessing performance are here asked to be mindful of the potentially disproportionate impacts of informal and/or additional teaching or service roles on academic staff who are junior and/or members of underrepresented and equity-seeking groups.
- reduced duties that may have been arranged with a Department during the pandemic period (e.g., some Departments have decided as a unit to limit the service responsibilities of pre-tenure colleagues during this period)

Academic staff do not need to provide supporting evidence for any of the factors cited above (e.g., medical notes or attestations showing canceled conference opportunities). Rather, it is a matter of explaining with some specificity and detail how any factors cited would have redirected, restricted, or augmented academic duties. Indeed, some of the factors cited above will involve disclosure of highly sensitive information. Decision makers for reappointment, tenure, promotion, and merit are already bound to treat information received through these processes in strict confidence; such is especially the case for information disclosed to show how personal circumstances affected academic performance during the pandemic.

### 3) For Chairs and reappointment/tenure/promotion committee members: assessing with fairness and rigour

The explanations that colleagues provide pursuant to Point #2 above, in the contexts of merit and reappointment/tenure/promotion, must be considered and be given due weight in assessing academic performance.

Additionally, reappointment and tenure committee members charged with assessing the reappointment and tenure dossiers of tenure-track colleagues must follow the following principles:

- A colleague's decision to elect, or not to elect, to defer tenure consideration on account of COVID-19 is neutral to the assessment of academic performance. The reappointment or tenure dossier must be considered on its own terms and reappointment and tenure committees should not consider or discuss their view of the candidate's judiciousness in electing – or not – to defer reappointment or tenure consideration.
- The criteria for reappointment and tenure at McGill – defined by the [Regulations Relating to the Employment of Tenure Track and Tenured Academic Staff](#) – have not changed. However, for those colleagues whose work was adversely affected by COVID-19 in a significant way, assessment should centre on the question: What can reasonably be expected of this member of academic staff given (a) the colleague's rank and (b) the impact of COVID-19 on their work?

As a final point, in all contexts involving the assessment of academic performance, colleagues charged with assessment should bear in mind that the impact of COVID-related decelerations or interruptions in work might take time before becoming apparent. For example, delays in research activity in 2020 might only be seen in 2022 or later given the time it can take from the point of research experimentation/investigation/study to publication or other forms of research dissemination.

These Guidelines will be reviewed annually by the Provost & Vice-Principal Academic (or delegate) in consultation with Faculties and MAUT.

Members of academic staff with questions may contact the [McGill Association of University Teachers \(MAUT\)](#).

Members of academic leadership with questions may contact the [Associate Provost, Equity & Academic Policies](#).

*Revised December 2022*